

Expectations of the Next war by officers of the Latvian army (1921-1939)

M.A. hist. Edgars Engīzers

Center for Security and Strategic Research, National Defense academy of Latvia, Latvia

edgars.engizerz@mil.lv

Expectations of the Next (Future) war is fundamentally important in **context** of training of new generation of soldiers and planning state defense policy. Predictions on what kind of war next conflict is going to be directly influences armament and training of units. At the same time, type of the Next war, is dependent on development of military equipment and novelty in application of art of war as well as on resources available for warfare. Officers of Latvian army mainly were trained in Russian imperial military academies, what in combination with their own war experience of the Great War and War of Independence made common understanding of warfare and shaped common expectations of future war. Notwithstanding that many new and talented officers attended military academies of France and Czechoslovakia thus bringing new West European ideas into Latvian military thinking. Until Second Italo – Abyssinian war development of perception of the Next war was mostly theoretical, but this war same as Spanish civil war brought practical approach to development of military thinking.

Research question of the paper is what were the expectations and perceptions of the Next war by officers of Latvian army. In development of armed forces it is necessary to avoid practice that army is trained for previous war, not the next one. As it is wrong to evaluate action of historical actors, in this case – politicians and soldiers, by knowledge of later time, to give a background for evaluation of preparedness of armed forces for forthcoming conflict, it is necessary to understand what was the expected future warfare – that includes not only broadness and length of conflict, but also type of actions – how technical it will be and which types of forces will be dominant. Author draws a hypothesis that joint expectations of the Next war were based on outdated perceptions of warfare. Up to now such evaluation of Latvian military thinking has not been done.

Purpose of paper is to analyze background of ideas of officers about Next war, to make ground for understanding theoretical reasons for realized national defense policy. Full evaluation of Latvian defense capability in 1939 – 1940 is impossible without understanding of reasons of realized state defense policy. And one of these reasons was expectations of the Next war.

To reach the aim of this research wide *source* base is used. *Analysis* of articles written by officers in military press, study materials in military academy and headquarter training materials as well as policy papers and legislative documents are used. *Content analysis* of each source shows only small part of common understanding and it is necessary to measure the impact of each source. Headquarter trainings are used as a *case study* for implementation of over-viewed expectations of type of forthcoming war. As far as it is possible to do that based on scientific literature and secondary sources, author also is *comparing* Latvian military thinking on the expectations of the Next war with Estonian and Lithuanian cases, that show joint development of Baltic military thinking. Chronologically of paper covers period from the end of War of Independence to beginning of the Second World war, which actually was that Next war in which Latvia got involved.

Main finding of research shows that just after the Great War and War of Independence officers of Latvian army thought that the next conflict in which Latvia might got involved will be a

combination of techniques of both previous wars – forces will be low mechanized and there will be masses drawn in action, but warfare itself will be mobile.

Spanish civil war, Winter war, German – Polish and Soviet – Polish wars showed high level of mechanization in European warfare, that led towards changes in theoretical perceptions of officers of Latvian army. Latvian officers re-evaluated role of mechanization and technical units in warfare

In whole period it was highly expected that in the Next war combat gases will play important role.

It is notable that in every single type of arms was quite deep understanding of development of that particular type of forces. For example, aviation officers realized boosted role of aviation in future combat, or artillery officers evaluated changes in artillery equipment as important factor in changing of type of Next war, but these perceptions did not became common and had not enough influence on common expectations of the Next war.

Experience gained by officers while training abroad and newest theoretical findings were not used effectively enough to influence common perceptions of majority of members of armed forces, managers of army and political decision makers.

Main **conclusions** of paper are that mainly there were no common understanding of type of the Next war and though some officers showed novelty in their judgments about development of one or another branches of military science and armed forces, until real combat in European theater, expectations of the Next war are very variable and mutually incompatible. Thus it is possible to say, that common expectations of the Next war were not formulated clearly enough and together with out dated perceptions that led to misunderstandings in a field of cooperation and in making of political decisions. In second part of 30ies the understanding of the Next war, as highly mechanized, total war started to raise and led to some changes in state defense policy and defense plans. Nevertheless they still did not cover full spectrum of future warfare as it was understood by officers. Despite there was significant cooperation with military academies of France and Czechoslovakia, implementation of West European ideas into Latvian military thinking was slow. If the officers mainly understood development of their branch of service, common understanding on wider perspective was hardly to formulate. Change of paradigm in Latvian military thinking came too late and was too slow to leave a significant impact of organization of armed forces, thus it is possible to say that Latvian army did not follow main course of revolutionary changes in military thinking in 20ies and because of that same as because of lack of resources for military development, was not competitive with challenges of Next (Future) war, when Second World war was on the stage.